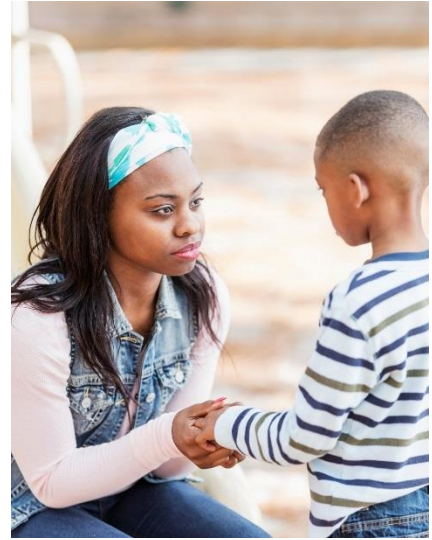


Helping Children Build Social Skills and Stay Connected to Peers While Social Distancing

Recommended Ages: 2-5 years old

About: Personal-social and communication development

Young children are just beginning to understand that there are other people in their world, including “little people” like themselves. When children develop peer relationships, they feel good about themselves and others. School, playdates, community playgroups, and sports provide children chances to connect. See below for some tips on helping children build social skills and stay connected with peers while social distancing.



- ❖ **Be a Role Model** – While playing, pretend you are the “wise child” by modeling skills you would like your child to practice in real life play situations. This may include using phrases such as “Can I play with you?” or “May I have a turn when you’re done?”
- ❖ **Give Gentle Reminders** – If your child is having difficulty practicing certain skills, gently guide him/her. Some examples could include: “Could you say you’d like a turn?” or more specifically “If you’d like a turn, you can say ‘may I have a turn when you’re done?’” For toddlers, give very simple feedback, such as 1-2 word phrases, that they can easily repeat.
- ❖ **Play Cooperative Games** – Include games with your child where turn taking is a part of the rules. This could be putting a puzzle together, rolling a ball back and forth, or building a tower. Most activities can become a turn-taking experience. Simply be sure to say “my turn” when it is your turn and “your turn” when it is your child’s turn.
- ❖ **Do Kind Acts for Others** – For older children, think of kind gestures they can do for others, such as sending a get-well letter to someone who is sick or dropping groceries off to an elderly neighbor. When children practice kindness, they learn empathy and how to connect with others.
- ❖ **Go Outside** – Schedule outdoor playdates for your child, such as going for a safely-distanced walk or riding bikes. Organize neighborhood gatherings from doorsteps and driveways involving singing, dancing, or putting on a show.
- ❖ **Use Technology** - Discover kid-friendly television and online shows focused on connecting with young viewers. For example, Sesame Street has an episode called “Elmo’s Playdate,” a virtual gathering that involved singing songs, dancing, and playing games remotely. Consider scheduling your own virtual playdates via free platforms such as Zoom, FaceTime, and Google Hangout. Talk with your child about what they would like to do during the playdate and try to limit time to 15-30 minutes to help him/her stay engaged.

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